

BALLET TODAY

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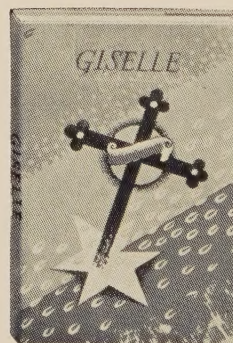
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Ballet Today

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

NOW seems the time to face the fact that Russian Ballet outside Russia has ceased to exist. Colonel Basil may call his company the Original Ballet Russe if he chooses, but the last, lingering influence of Diaghilev has finally disappeared. The present company is in no sense a return of the old glories after the lapse necessitated by the war years; it is an entirely new company which has not yet had time either to assimilate an existing repertoire or to develop its own personality. Both may come with time but only if some way can be found to revive these ballets as they really were and not as they have been imperfectly and ill remembered, and if the company is not forced to imitate something which it no longer knows and cannot understand; for the few dancers left from pre-war days are not sufficient to give the old character. Basil may hope that his present company can run for years on the competency of revivals of an enormous old repertoire which will save him the trouble of finding new choreographers, designers and composers, but this season has already shown that many of these ballets are beyond any possibility of successful revival, belonging as they do to an epoch, a style, and a company that is irrevocably gone, and that even if they were magnificently done (which was not, alas, the case) they would still seem dated and even ridiculous. For the manhandling, however, of the *Dances from "Prince Igor"* and *Le Beau Danube*, to mention only two, it is difficult to find any words of condonation; neither does it seem possible that there was no one in charge to prevent some of the more obvious discrepancies in production and choreography. It was not to be expected that a new company could, in six weeks, put on fourteen ballets, some of which on their original production had been rehearsed for a year beforehand, and the colossal feat of memory performed by every dancer concerned must in itself remain a phenomenon, but the stage of Covent Garden is not the place for a series of dress rehearsals. Disappointment was generally felt and expressed, but there is a serious danger that this disappointment may engender an increase in the perfervid enthusiasm for enterprises in this country which do not automatically

become better because something else falls below expectations. Let it be remembered that though Better is the enemy of Good, Worse is the best friend of Bad.

Constant Lambert's influence in Sadler's Wells Ballet went so far beyond the limitations implied by his official title of Musical Director, that it is impossible to estimate yet the effect that his resignation may have on the future of the company. We shall all find it hard to get used to the idea of Sadler's Wells without him, though after fifteen years of unremitting devotion to the cause of English Ballet he may well feel that he is now entitled to think of himself first for a change. He will take with him the good wishes of every ballet lover. No announcement has yet been made as to who will take his place as musical director, but Hugo Rignold will share duties as conductor with Geoffrey Corbett.

It is good news that Sol Hurok and Lucia Chase have resolved their difficulties and that the former will once more be managing the American Ballet Theatre. It is too late now for the company to appear at the New York Metropolitan Opera House this autumn as arrangements have already been made for them to appear at the City Center, but Hurok will be in charge of their winter tour and will present them at the Metropolitan next spring. This excellent news makes their appearance next year in London much more of a probability and they will be all the more welcome because we missed them so much this year.

Prague is having the opportunity still denied us of making a direct comparison between Soviet Ballet and English Ballet. During the International Youth Congress held in July and August it was visited by a strongly representative contingent of Soviet dancers, including Olga Lepeshinskaya and the two new Moscow stars, Raisa Struchkova and Maya Plesetskaya. They presented excerpts from the modern Russian repertoire, including the third act of *Bakchiserai Fountain*. Around about the time this magazine will be appearing Sadler's Wells Ballet will be dancing in Prague in ballets from our own modern repertoire.

Ram Gopal, the famous Indian dancer, whose great success in this country just before the war will be remembered by many, recently arrived back in London. His company of twenty dancers and eight musicians are coming over in small groups as transport conditions permit, and he is giving a special series of matinées at the Adelphi Theatre, London, during November. He is also very anxious to establish a centre of Indian culture in London, which should do much to combat the overwhelming ignorance here on all matters pertaining to that great but practically unknown country. He tells a wonderful story of meeting a hermit in the hills of Southern India. This old man (he was 105 years old) was a Frenchman and he told Gopal that he had seen Taglioni dance! As proof, he showed a pair of her slippers and a piece of lace which had once belonged to her. That is a story to make a ballet lover's spine tingle.

P. W. M.

LES BALLETS DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES IN LONDON

By MARY CLARKE

HOW quick bright things come to confusion! And how sad that performances by Les Ballets des Champs-Élysées—a company with stronger artistic direction than almost any of their contemporaries—should so often be marred if not ruined simply for want of a little sound business management. A fine repertoire, brilliant décors and some dancers whose talent comes near to genius, can all be dissipated by inefficiency of presentation, publicity and programming—and this company's gifts are far too great to be squandered in such fashion.

After a grouse, let us come to the pleasures of the season which, during June, brought London two new Petit ballets as well as the Kochno-Petit version of *La Sylphide*.

La Sylphide has been reconstructed from contemporary records of the Taglioni ballet which was first produced in Paris on March 12th, 1832. The ballet's tremendous success inaugurated the Romantic period in Ballet which, nine years later, produced its finest flower, *Giselle*. *La Sylphide* created such a furore that it was described and reported at enormous length by Gautier, Janin, Dr. Véron, the London *Times*, and countless others, and from their records and contemporary lithographs Kochno and Petit have produced the present version.

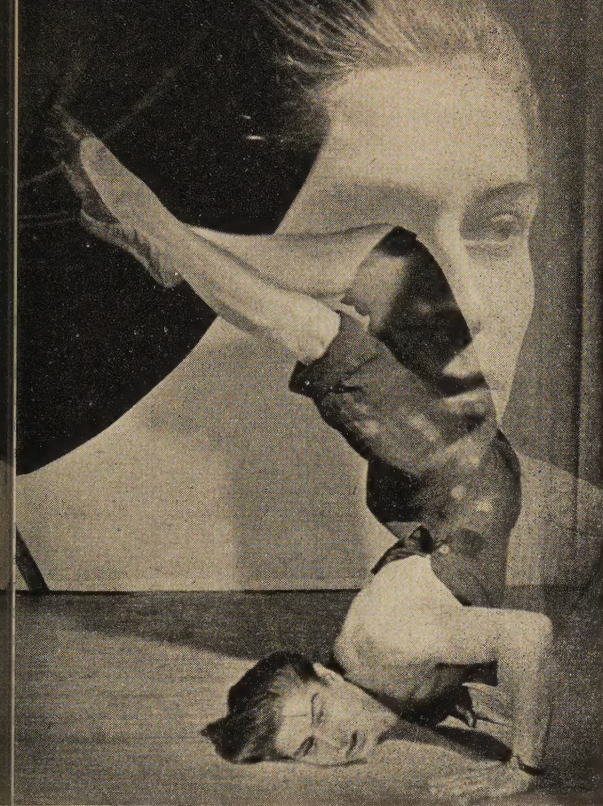
They have been remarkably fortunate in their collaborators. Serebriakoff's settings—the bare Scots farmhouse of Act I, and the dim, haunted forest of Act II—are beautiful in themselves, besides echoing the original designs of Ciceri and fulfilling all the needs of the libretto. Bérard has also allowed respect for Eugene Lami's costumes to govern but not submerge him. The sylphide wears an almost exact replica of the famous Taglioni costume (which started the vogue for white bell-shaped skirts that found its apotheosis in Fokine's *Les Sylphides* eighty years later); the Scots wear gay tartans; while Madge and her attendant witches are shrouded in gauzy rags of wonderful fiery, smoky colours, causing them to look like pockets of evil marsh gas as they bound into the air. The original Schneitzhoeffter music is exactly what one expected it to be like—tinkly, tuneful, dramatic, perfectly suggesting the Paris Opera of the 1830's.

The story of *La Sylphide* is a typical Romantic tragedy of James, a young Scots peasant, who loses his bride and earthly happiness by vainly pursuing his dream of a sylphide. The choreography of the present version is

by M. Gsovsky, the distinguished French ballet master (although the programmes in London, as in Paris, did not acknowledge it). It is remarkably true to period, harking back to the French original and not introducing the modern technical embroideries which crept into *Giselle* during that ballet's sojourn in Russia towards the end of last century. The sylphide's dances are based upon the *arabesque* and the *grand jété*, and the basis of most supported adagio is the *grand rond de jambe*, with its beautiful, poetic extension. The men's dances are fairly simple technically (in 1832 the *cabriolet* and the *double tour en l'air* had not been perfected, although *entrechats* were popular), but even so the male dancer obviously had a much better time of it then than thirty years later when the cult of the ballerina (originated by Taglioni's extraordinary popularity) had almost driven him from the boards. The action of the ballet is conveyed almost wholly by dancing, only a few brief passages being mimed. The best composed dances are the *pas de trois* at the end of the first act when James dances, in an agony of indecision, with his fiancée Effie and the sylphide, and the charming "garland" *pas de deux* in Act II.

La Sylphide was obviously cramped at the Winter Garden, and the dancers found some difficulty in adjusting the choreography to the shallow stage, but it was generally well danced. Irène Skorik is physically unsuited to the role of the sylphide, having a tendency to heaviness, while her dancing in London was further handicapped by fatigue and ill-health. Her best moments were in the second act where she gave real pathos to the little scene in which she brings James a bird's nest from the top of a tree and is childishly hurt when he tells her to put it safely back.

On June 27th, Nina Vyroubova, for whom the part was re-created, gave her single London performance in the ballet—just three weeks after undergoing an operation. Tall, frail, dark, with an ivory pallor, Vyroubova looks the sylphide of everyone's imagination, and in addition to these gifts she has the effortless *legato* flow of movement that marks the true ballerina, and is an exceptional mime. She conveyed completely the ethereality of the sylph and her fascination for James, while her "ability to be lifted beautifully" maintained the illusion of flight created by her own elevation. To have seen Vyroubova dance *La Sylphide* in 1947, is no small compensation for those of us born a century too late to see Marie Taglioni herself.



graph by Duncan Melvin

AN BABILÉE AND HIS SLOW SOMERSAULT IN "LE JEUNE HOMME ET LA MORT"

Roland Petit makes James a charming, lovable youth. He is a brilliant natural mime and never for one moment drops out of character while on the stage. Nathalie Philippart as Effie suggested a delicate little creature of faun-like shyness, but Marguerite Schanne's warmly human village girl was probably nearer the character, and made a wider contrast between James's two loves.

Le Jeune Homme et la Mort is a Jean Cocteau ballet on the favourite Cocteau theme that a man's best friend is his Death. It has a Wakhevitch setting of a Paris garret followed by a panorama of the Paris rooftops; it is danced by Jean Babilée and Nathalie Philippart; and the music is Johann Sebastian Bach's Passacaglia in C Minor. This sounds a remarkable mixture of styles, but it is often true that things which are incompatible in theory acquire their own balletic truth and homogeneity in the theatre. *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* certainly does. Cocteau devised it all himself, explaining what he wanted to Wakhevitch, Petit, Karinska, Babilée and Philippart, so the décor, choreography, costumes and dancing are all moulded by his presidency.

The action concerns a young man visited by a girl he loves who spurns him. When she leaves him, he



Action photograph by Duncan Melvin

NATHALIE PHILIPPART AND JEAN BABILÉE IN "LE JEUNE HOMME ET LA MORT"

hangs himself, and Death, appearing to him in the form of the girl, leads him to happiness. It is a ballet for only two dancers, the first of its calibre since *Le Spectre de la Rose*, and like the Fokine ballet it is really a ballet and not just an extended *pas de deux*. Wakhevitch's set is, in its way, as great as Bakst's, although instead of the virginal simplicity of a young girl's bedroom he creates a Paris garret of terrible, sordid poverty. Petit's choreography is based entirely on classical ballet technique: Babilée, for instance, rises nervously in a quick *double tour en l'air* as he awaits the girl, and when he begins his frenzied furniture-smashing, the impetus gained from hurling a chair swings him into a *pirouette*. There is perfect contrast between Philippart's vicious, staccato *pointe* work and the slow, yearning movements of the young man in love. The choreography is so bare of extraneous gesture that every movement tells and drives at the heart.

The Bach music, fundamentally as unsuitable as Weber's was for *Le Spectre de la Rose*, is strangely right. The dancers rehearsed to jazz, and it is purely by timing that they measure their performance with the orchestra, so almost any other music would "fit". And yet no other music would do, since one touch of banality

would shatter the whole ballet or tip it into sensationalism: the mighty progression and inevitability of Bach's music is a positive quality in the structure of the ballet.

Both Babilée and Philippart gave inspired performances in *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*, and it is as unimaginable without them as *Le Spectre de la Rose* was without Nijinsky and Karsavina. Because both dancers are great artists every seemingly sadistic episode is so clothed in their beauty of movement that it is transmuted into an æsthetic pleasure.

The third new offering, Kochno's *Le Bal des Blanchisseuses*, did not come near the heights of *La Sylphide* or *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*, but had its moments for all that. A washerwomen's ball was a lovely idea for a ballet, Lepri's setting received an ovation at every performance and the on-stage clarinetist playing a Vernon Duke's blues was a wonderful touch. For once, however, Petit's choreographic invention deserted him: there were some charming balletic-acrobatics for Danièle Darmance—who tossed them off with the utmost nonchalance, although I doubt if they fully exploited her abilities—but the choreography for the *corps de ballet* was indistinct and further confused by fussy costumes. Petit is at present happier when creating for individuals than for a large *corps*.

The remainder of the Champs-Élysées repertoire had been previously seen in London. It was a joy to see again the gently satiric *Les Amours de Jupiter*. How perfectly the characters are realised and contrasted! The cool classicism of Sadowska's Europa, Skorik's rosy immaturity as Leda (her best part), the weariness of Philippart as Danæ, Teddy Rodolphe's fear and youth as Ganymede, and the embracing forgiveness of Schanne's Juno are beautifully displayed in Petit's choreography and Hugo's chic costumes. Petit's own performance as Jupiter holds the whole ballet together while the quivering flight of Babilée's Mercury is indeed immortal.

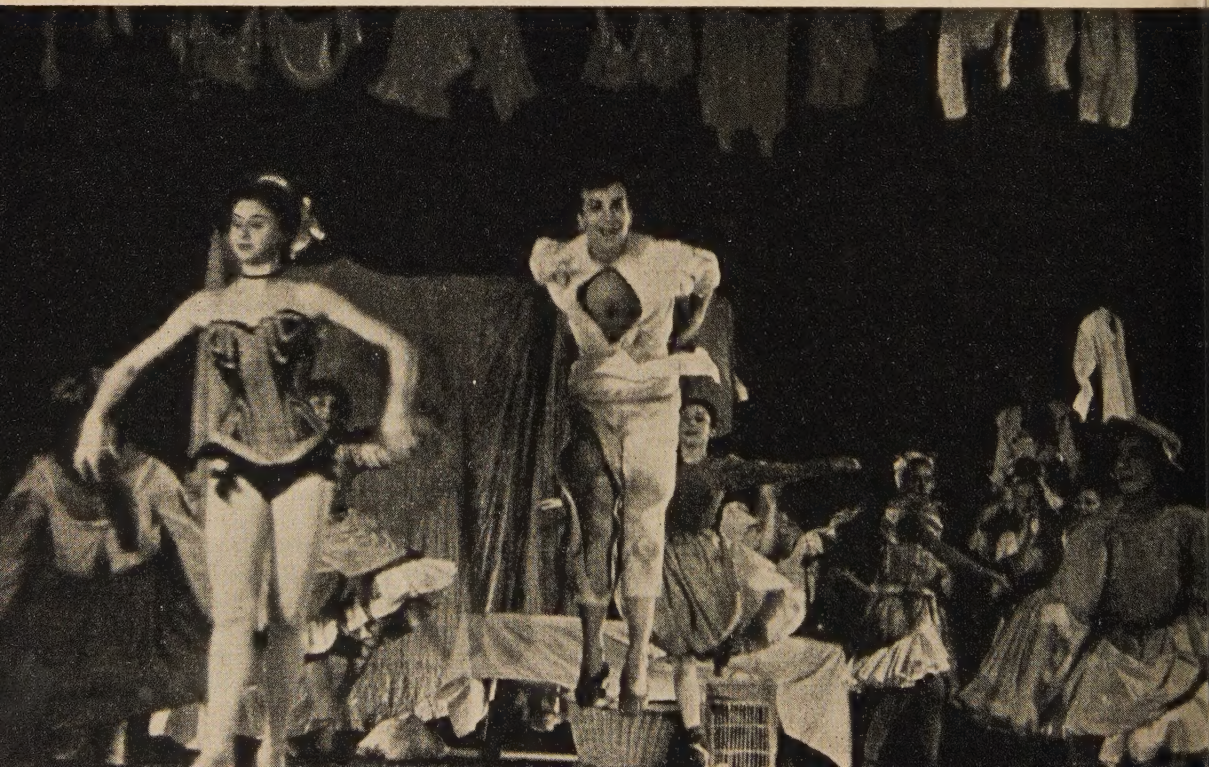
Le Rendezvous, too, is a major work, if not completely integrated. It is a simple story of Destiny overtaking a young man in the midst of the teeming life of the Paris gutters. Costumes are mostly realistic, décor is photographic, but the breath of fantasy contained in the ghastly figure of Death and the compassion for "les enfants qui s'aiment" keep the work on the plane of ballet and, therefore, of art.

Charrat's *Jeu de Cartes* is dry, neat, sophisticated, mannered and elegantly clothed by Pierre Roy. Philippart is enchanting, and watching Babilée's Joker I was reminded of Carl Van Vechten's phrase about Nijinsky: "His movements have the unbroken quality of music".

(Continued on page 25)

DANIÈLE DARMANCE AND ROLAND PETIT IN "LE BAL DES BLANCHISSEUSES"

Action photograph by Duncan Melvin



BALLET RAMBERT AT SADLER'S WELLS

By FRANK JACKSON

THE Rambert season at the Wells produced two new works—a major one, *Sailor's Return*, and a minor, *Plaisance* (which was reviewed in the previous issue of *Ballet Today*). I intend to devote much of this review to the new André Howard ballet, but first there are some things which need to be said, in general and in particular, about this company.

There is no doubt whatever that what the Ballet Rambert needs more than anything is the solid body of regular support which can only be based on a permanent home; this will be the fundamental problem facing the company on its return from Australia. As it is, Madame Rambert suffers equally from uncritical and sporadic enthusiasm on the one hand and from totally unwarranted neglect on the other. It was noticeable during the Wells season that the theatre was crowded for the first nights (thus proving that Madame Rambert maintains her place in the esteem of fashionable ballet-goers) but almost half empty otherwise, except towards the end of the season when new ballet-goers had had the time to tell their friends about the company—the safest method of publicity. But by then it was too late.

Certain resultant deficiencies in the company's work were only too obvious—a tendency to raggedness in the *corps de ballet*; an occasional general lack of interest and care; a tendency to overplay for cheap effects; and, worst of all, slipshod stage management and a disinterested orchestra, which only deserved what it got—dismissal. These things the fashionable ones commented upon all too loudly, forgetting that greater loyalty on their part would have obviated many of the faults, and that in any case there was not one which would not be cured by a permanent home. (This is specially and personally meant, for example, for the woman in front of me on the opening night, who talked loudly through every ballet about the faults of the company which, in truth, she could scarcely have observed, so deep was she in conversation, and only interrupted her noisy and rude remarks to enthuse as loudly and uncritically every time John Gilpin appeared on the stage. It was not even a compliment to Gilpin, for she was too busy talking to look at him.)

It is an extraordinary tribute to Madame Rambert, but one which she richly deserves that, in spite of all

SALLY GILMOUR AND WALTER GORE IN "SAILOR'S RETURN"

SALLY GILMOUR AS TULIP IN "SAILOR'S RETURN"

Photographs by Duncan Melvin



difficulties, something indefinable always came across the footlights—something one can only call "style". I shall never forget what Ballet Theatre did to *Jardin aux Lilas*—this, for me, was final proof that Rambert has something unique to give us, and not transplantable—even to a richer soil.

There was much on the credit side of the season, too. One of the ballet's biggest assets is Sally Gilmour's extraordinary ability to create a complete personality the moment she appears on the stage. Her range is so wide that it can include with equal verisimilitude the pallid calm of the dead *Giselle*, the neurotic frenzy of *Caroline* and the tragi-comedy of little *Tulip*.

Another of the company's assets which has at best been sadly underestimated and at worst completely overlooked, is Walter Gore's sensitive musicality. This is most evident in his choreography; he is one of the least literary of our choreographers, and achieves his effects with a minimum of "programme" and a maximum exploitation of the resources of dancing. I don't think *Mr. Punch* is an exception.

But, in addition to Gore and Gilmour, the company contains much talent which is visibly improving from season to season. It would be unwise to list names here, since, in the end one would mention everybody—for every dancer has something to give to the ensemble, and, indeed, the company's team spirit is not the least of its assets. It is this more than anything which makes possible the continuance of the Rambert style through all changes of personnel.

I haven't space to comment on the entire repertoire, but I would like to mention one or two of the older works to which my reactions crystallised or changed as a result of the season.

It was delightful to see *Czernyana* again; this ballet, with its adroit mixture of romance and ridicule, is as clean and fresh as its costumes and décor, and is a perfect frame for the increasingly evident comic gifts of Frank Staff who, however, particularly in *Peter and the Wolf*, also showed on occasion a regrettable tendency to play for cheap laughs.

But whereas *Czernyana* seems so completely right to me, I am certain that Tudor has found just the wrong dance expression for the sophisticated neurosis of *Kindertotenlieder*. Whatever the music may be, it is not Mittel-Europa pseudo-peasant posturings, however well done. Similarly I think nothing could be further from the spirit of the music than the Nijinsky realisation of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (this is no criticism of the way it was danced by the Company) and I wish we could be allowed to forget this particular work.

I enjoyed seeing *Mermaid* again. Here is a ballet whose faults have been so often remarked upon that it is worth while remembering its virtues—the apt fluidity of the choreography in the first scene, which is achieved without obvious facility; the particularly



Photograph by Duncan Melvin

JOYCE GRAEME AS THE QUEEN OF THE WILIS IN "GISELLE"

attractive Ravel music; the completely effective economy and taste of décor and costumes.

And so to *Sailor's Return*. I don't question the wisdom of the decision to manage without an orchestra, but, because of this, we were robbed of a couple of performances of a work which in my opinion needs a large number of viewings before it can be reasonably judged. However, a certain amount can be said now, with the proviso that everything may need revision later.

I must say at once that I was deeply moved by it, both by the comedy of the first act and by the tragedy of the second. (Incidentally, the ease with which the emotional changeover between the acts was made is, I think, a special tribute to the music of Arthur Oldham and the personalities of Sally Gilmour and Walter Gore.) On the first night I felt that it was the most important work that Howard has yet given us, and I was particularly interested to see that she had made such a successful essay in the objective translation of someone else's material into dancing. She had, of course, made a similar achievement with *Lady into Fox* and, to a lesser degree, with *Fête Etrange*, but I had been afraid after *Mardi Gras*, impressive as it is, that she might be retreating into a world in which it would not be possible for us to follow. I am not, of course, implying that Howard would have chosen this particular book had she not been attracted to it, nor that she has

not infused into it much personal feeling. But the point is that the use of someone else's thematic material imposes limits on the choreographer which, after *Mardi Gras*, one might have expected to have hampered her. Fortunately, the reverse is true.

However, I must also say that I don't think *Sailor's Return* is a ballet at all, but a dance drama. This is more than a mere quibble on words, and implies no adverse criticism. It is simply an attempt at definition. The difference is, I should say, that dance drama is more interested than ballet in story telling and character drawing. The story in *Sailor's Return* is, indeed, so important that often Howard has had to sacrifice dancing to it—as, for instance, in the part played by Joyce Graeme which had an obvious dramatic point, but which could scarcely be called ballet. Yet there is some fine dancing in the work, particularly in the second scene of the first act which resolves itself into three *solis* of the greatest verve and ingenuity. John Gilpin also has some fine *pas seuls* which cleverly exploit his strong points. But otherwise I should say that *Sailor's Return* is choreographically restricted. It is not without interest that several critics have compared it to *Peter Grimes*; but no one, so far as I know, has compared it to another ballet.

The one serious flaw in the work was, for me, the opening scene, which is completely out of key with

the naturalistic atmosphere of the rest. Its dramatic point is, I take it, to show us something of Tulip's background and make more explicable some of her later actions, particularly the ritual burning of her wedding dress. But I found this introduction disturbing because it was so obviously a fake. If such an introduction is considered necessary (and I am sure it is not) then we should either have had real negro dancers to real negro rhythms, or some other way out should have been sought, through stylisation or expressionism perhaps, though this, again, would mean a mixture of styles.

It may be objected that, after all, Sally Gilmour is not a negress and that it is therefore illogical on my part to complain about the unreality of the introduction since, from that point of view, Tulip is a fake throughout. The answer is that we grow to believe in Tulip, but nothing could convince us that honest Harry Cordwell is a native chief. The choreographer has no right to make such impossible demands of her dancers.

Arthur Oldham's music is always apt, always more than decorative. Indeed, it is impossible to tell just how much of the success of *Sailor's Return* is due to the music, which gives something to the choreography which it does not possess of itself—as, of course, all good ballet music should. I understand that some of the score may be recorded, and I look forward to hearing it with the greatest interest.

THE ENGLISH ACTOR-DANCER

By ALAN STOREY

ONE of the more irritating characteristics of this country is its unquestioning acceptance of convenient generalisations—particularly those made by outsiders. Indeed, once a generalisation takes its place in the national heritage, its removal is regarded as sacrilegious, if not downright unconstitutional. What are we to make then of Massine's recent complaint that England (and America) lacks character dancers, when it is generally conceded (particularly among our more chauvinistic enthusiasts) that in this sphere of ballet—if in no other—England can claim pre-eminence?

It is perhaps unfortunate that Massine should choose to refute one generalisation by another. True, he does follow the complaint with these words: "Many of the smallest roles in my ballets became of the first importance in the hands of character artists in the days of Diaghilev; dancers now tend to regard this field as unimportant and 'beneath them'." Nevertheless, even allowing for the lack of opportunity for further definition and amplification in a press interview, the observation is open to differences of interpretation. I think it may be assumed, however, that by "character

dancer" Massine refers not to the stock mime who hides his limitations under periwigs and superficial exaggerations, but rather to that rarest of ballet artists—the dancer-mime who is proficient in both *genres*.

The observation makes for fascinating speculation because it happens to penetrate beneath the condition of ballet in this country; it is, in fact, an implied criticism of the English histrionic temperament. The English Theatre has always been rich in its grotesques and "heavy" character parts, in which the personality of the actor is subordinated to the external eccentricities of gesture and diction enforced by a clearly defined interpretation. And it is significant that the English Drama was the first to abandon the classical theatre of ideas, with its formal character types, for the romantic development of character as a dramatic *motif* complete in itself. The comparative rarity of "pure" acting, in which a player can depend on nothing more than the assimilation of his own technical resources of gesture and diction by a carefully created individual interpretation, is due entirely to a predominant self-consciousness and lack of adequate technical equipment.

Similar deficiencies of technique and expressiveness led to the invention of the opera-musical in this country—a clever compromise which enabled the composer and producer to mask the crudity of dancing and singing by throwing the emphasis on musical interludes and spectacle, and leaving dramatic development exclusively to the actors.

It follows that the inherent weaknesses in the English theatre as a whole are bound to have their repercussions on a national ballet. And I feel sure that this, together with the evident fact that a ballet-maker is obliged to utilise the limitations of his or her dancers, has led to the present tendency to create in terms of drama. In other words, the thematic evolution in such ballets as *The Rake's Progress*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *The Prospect Before Us*, the Helpmann dance-dramas, and even *Apparitions*, is made in terms of dramatic action, or mime divorced from dance, rather than from the medium of the dance. Even in cases where the dance is used (i.e., the dance of the young girl in *The Rake's Progress*, and of the flower girl in *Nocturne*), the results are not satisfactory. The only two dances I can think of in the national repertoire, requiring equal skill in both acting and dancing, are those of the gentleman with a rope and the dancing master.

The lack of balance between technique and expression is even more noticeable in the classic *demi-caractère* parts which require the complete sublimation of self and technique. Characterisations are far too often exaggerated through lack of a creative imagination, and the lyrical pattern of the whole—especially in the Fokine revivals—destroyed by an alien dramatic intensity. As C. W. Beaumont points out in his review of the Wells' *Carnaval*, "The mere dressing-up in a crinoline and poke bonnet, or peg-top trousers and swallow-tailed coat, does not automatically make one a Victorian or create a Victorian atmosphere. . . . It is necessary to cultivate a sense of period and mood by studying Victorian paintings and drawings, or by reading Victorian literature, in the hope of first creating within oneself a Victorian outlook, to be infused later in the prescribed steps and gestures. *The essence of all Fokine ballets is style-atmosphere, expressiveness of movement, and the most careful timing*". (My italics.)

Again, in *Le Spectre de la Rose*, the present dancer of the Spectre, Alexis Rassiné, is hindered by inadequate technical control; his concentration on individual steps, allied to the limited means of expression at his command (very marked in his interpretation of Albrecht), prevents him from achieving a fusion of ethereal movements with those of a suggestive, though never intrusive, virility. In varying degree, this is true of all his colleagues; their performances of romantic roles, such as Albrecht and Franz (and even such "booby" roles as Florimund and Siegfried) are—to paraphrase Hazlitt—studies or rehearsals of the parts as preparatory

performances: hardly yet appearing to have assumed their characters; and in which something more is wanting. "A literary man—with a wooden leg" was Mr. Boffin's description of Silas Wegg; it might well be used to describe some of our actor-dancers. The absence of style-atmosphere is not due to the feelings of superiority referred to by Massine; it appears to rise from self-consciousness and lack of confidence in an ability to coalesce art and expression.

The example and influence of Robert Helpmann, both as a dancer and as a ballet-maker, has undoubtedly played a major part in forming the standards of English Ballet. Almost every major ballet in the national repertoire, with the notable exceptions of Ashton's incursions in the field of "pure" dancing, have been created round him. But Helpmann is a phenomenon in the ballet world; a near-genius whose shortcomings are disarmingly arrayed as virtues. Although his technique as a dancer is restricted by his physical limitations, within its confines it is exquisitely finished. Nevertheless, this fact added to his exceptional acting abilities and stage presence, has dictated the nature of each of his roles from the Master of Tregennis onwards, and, indirectly, the nature of the ballets in which they appear. Their bases are essentially mimetic rather than dance; and even when the dance appears it is minimised within the range of his accomplishment; just as the actual dancing of Albrecht, of Siegfried, and of the male variation in *Les Sylphides*, has been imperceptibly modified.

Naturally, Helpmann has allowed his natural inclinations to predominate in his own ballets. The dance has been replaced by stylised movement, and the development of choreographic design by the dramatic devices of the legitimate drama. His dancers are "silent" actors schooled in the use of expressive, dramatic gestures which require little or no technical accomplishment in dance technique. Helpmann does not excuse this situation, on the contrary he offers it as a valid platform. "My first problem was to find for myself a definite line, and my natural tendency was directed towards the more dramatic . . ." he says, and continues, ". . . Every movement made on the stage by a dancer must be dancing. Even to walk across the stage is, I find, to the average dancer often more difficult than a set of *brisés*, and impossible for the average actor . . ." It is noticeable that the most important figure to emerge from the Helpmann ballets is David Paltenghi, who possesses an impressive stage personality, and is an excellent mime with little dance technique.

The point of Massine's remarks must be, by now, fairly clear. The division between works for the technicians, represented by Ashton's *Symphonic Variations*, *Horoscope*, and most of *The Wanderer*, and mime-dramas for the actors, represented by Helpmann's ballets, together with a number of De Valois's, has produced ballets which, though they may be impressive

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THE COPENHAGEN CHOREOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

by FERNAU HALL

IN spite of the fact that only about one ballet in four or five can be taken seriously, the International Choreographic Competitions organised by the Archives Internationales de la Danse are of considerable importance. They provide a bird's-eye view of the major trends in ballet in nearly all countries where this art is taken seriously, and allow one to see the future taking shape.

The first A.I.D. competition was held in Paris in 1932, when the "modern dance" was still struggling for recognition outside Central Europe. First prize went to Jooss for *The Green Table*. Another competition was held in Stockholm in 1945, but this was attended only by Scandinavian countries. It was not until June, 1947, when a major competition was held in Copenhagen, that it was possible to estimate the main lines of progress since 1932.

Companies from all over Europe and America entered for the Copenhagen competition, but only twenty-three ballets actually reached the Royal Theatre. This was just as well: flesh and blood could hardly have stood any more.

No one ballet stood out as *The Green Table* did in 1932. The importance of the Jooss ballet was made clear by the fact that nearly all the 1947 ballets of any value show its influence. For Jooss himself this ballet was an end rather than a beginning, and only two of the new choreographers use the Jooss style; but the importance of his idea in combining the "modern" and classical dance was strongly evident in all the best ballets.

Without exception the ballets in free style without any elements of the classical technique were bad, with little technique and a general atmosphere of woolly sentimentality. It is now clear that the free dance can give superb results in the hands of great soloists like Wigman and Kreutzberg, but in its pure form it is not suitable for the creation of ballets, and it tends to degenerate rapidly. On the other hand the influence of the modern dance in liberating the imagination of choreographers has been of great importance. The ballets shown in Copenhagen in the pure classical tradition were conventional and dull in the extreme: those from Finland and Denmark showed no awareness of any progress in ballet since Petipa, and one from Paris was cerebral and acrobatic. All the ballets in which the content found a satisfactory expression through dancing showed some sort of fusion of the free and classical styles.

Reports of the coming dissolution of the Ballets Jooss gave special interest to the work of the Swedish Dance Theatre, which uses the Jooss style. Birgit Cullberg was trained at the Jooss-Leeder School, and her choreography is severely limited in range; on the other hand her craftsmanship is superb. In her comic ballet *The Three Musketeers*, shown at Copenhagen, the humour suffers to some extent from the stodginess of Jooss' comic ballets, but she builds up to the finale with exhilarating skill, and in Sweden she has produced a number of powerful ballets on social themes.

Ivo Cramér, twenty-six-year-old director of Swedish Dance Theatre, is very different from Cullberg in temperament. His knowledge of the Jooss style is second-hand (via Cullberg), and he uses it with breathtaking flexibility and spontaneity. His ballet, *The Message* (portraying scenes from the life of Christ), was the most consistently satisfying work seen at Copenhagen. Cramér has impeccable taste: every detail of choreography, lighting and costume is well-nigh perfect. He is a dancer of exceptional power, in spite of certain technical weaknesses. (His ferocious solo dance representing Herod gloating over his victims is unforgettable.) He also uses the talents of his dancers with great skill.

Unfortunately Cramér's development as a choreographer is limited by the fact that he takes the path of least resistance. He invariably chooses stories which everyone knows, presenting them in a series of loosely-linked episodes and avoiding choreographic problems rather than solving them. *The Message* was first called *Bible Pictures* (an account of which appeared in *Ballet Today* No. 5). Like Mendelssohn, Cramér has started at the top, but, unless he finds themes which really matter to him, he is liable to go downhill the same way.

Sharply contrasting with the ballets presented by Swedish Dance Theatre was the Ernest Berk ballet, *Trilustrum*, presented by Dance Theatre, the English company founded last year by Nesta Brooking and Ernest Berk. A smooth-running performance made a strong impression because of the powerful theme (the varied reactions of an English family to the war and the peace) and the close-knit structure.

The other two English productions presented by the Hampstead Ballet Club and the Manchester Art of Movement Studio respectively were so bad that they evoked derisive laughter. (In justice to the

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TATIANA RIABOUCHINSKA AND VLADIMIR DOKOUDOVSKY IN "PAGANINI"

Action photographs by Edward Mandinian

THE FINAL TABLEAU OF "LES PRÉSAGES"



I WEEP FOR ADONAI

A Dirge by CARYL BRAHMS

SOME weeks ago I said in the columns of one of the London evening papers—and of course my comment has been babbled back at me in half-a-dozen foyers, usually under the guise of Haskell's latest—that while what the Champs-Élysées company lacks is a Ninette de Valois, what the Wells Ballet lacks is a Boris Kochno. Half way through the summer season of Ballet Russe at the Garden it has become apparent that what the Basil Ballet lacks is a Massine, Balanchine, Danilova, Baronova, Toumanova, Riabouchinska, Woizikovsky and Lichine—all in the fullness of their vigour and with time in hand to develop, to astonish, and to delight—together with a supporting company of artists of the dance, schooled to suffer one another, if not gladly at least in what passes in the Russian temperament for union. For that was the plus that it took to conquer London from the Alhambra Theatre in 1933. Anything less is nothing like good enough. And that is why, while making all those allowances that goodwill and gratitude dictate, I have felt the season to be a saddening experience.

In 1933 Colonel de Basil was well equipped to compete with the memory of the excitement, the emotional and intellectual stimulus, and the great chic of the Diaghilev tradition. He had the fabulous ballets of the Diaghilev repertoire—in varying states of repair. He had two of Diaghilev's finest choreographers to revive the best of the ballets, to create new works, and to find, project, and exploit new dancing personalities. And, furthermore, he was presenting a galaxy of matchless dancers. If, in 1933 and the years that followed, Basil never quite achieved the chic of his great predecessor, his London seasons were never lacking in excitement—save possibly that of 1938, by which time Massine, Balanchine, Danilova, Toumanova and Woizikovsky had left the company.

But what does Basil bring to London in 1947 to pit against our own finely disciplined, though sadly inhibited, Sadler's Wells Ballet, the friendliness and expertise of the American Ballet Theatre, the technical virtuosity of "the Lifar lot", and the charm, taste and sophistication of the Champs-Élysées company? He brings to London a newly collected assemblage of artists—Russian, American, French, and minor English dancers. He presents this almost fortuitously-formed troupe in time-tinged masterpieces, imperfectly remembered, created for—and on—the scintillating stars of the thirties; and he presents it without any dancer who, judged on present form, would have been accounted a star in the thirties. He presents it

amid desperately daubed-over décors and in crudely renewed costumes. And, gallant White Russian that he is, he hopes for the best. And the best has been an ineradicable glimpse of the grand manner in backcloths by Sudeikine (*Paganini*), Roerich (*Igor*), Gontcharova (*Coq d'Or*), Bakst (*Schéhrazade*), Rouault (*Fils Prodigue*), crudely lit, but hanging the stage like flags that have been borne in battle, just as sad and just as, somehow, heartening.

Let us strive to be fair to the Colonel. It is not his fault that Riabouchinska, who headed the company for the first two weeks, is no longer nineteen. Nor that Lichine, who left for South America with her, is less lithe. We in this country know well that a war deprives a ballet company of its male strength and lays an almost unendurable strain upon overworked ballerinas and overtired *corps de ballets*. Have we not seen our own best dancers growing tired before their time?

Then, too, taste changes—even in Great Britain, the stronghold of tradition in the arts. New audiences arise and look for new qualities of emotion and event and different manners of expressing them in movement. Freud replaces Pushkin. Our Swanildas are all Ophelias or small-town Hannahs. Our Danilovas, schooled, sophisticated, astringent, are turned into Fonteyns and Kayes, so easy, so friendly, so simple.

No, we cannot blame Basil because he has not been able to hold back the Ballet clock for us.

But how can we refrain from suspecting that his London season was too late envisaged and too early embarked upon?

Writing at the end of the third week of a season that already seems to have been going on all my life, I find that we have seen eleven ballets. Of these the robustious but indifferently danced *Coq d'Or* and the sturdy and equally under-danced *Igor* have seemed to me to be the least moribund. *Les Présages*, a work that I have always disliked profoundly, justified my disbelief by being as dated as last year's appointment diary. Moreover, lacking the young, the eloquent, Baronova of the thirties, it was indeed a *ballet manqué*. *Paganini* still seems to me to be a mess—albeit a mess by a master—to the sort of music (Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*) that I play to warm me just before I have to go to see my bank manager. In *Les Sylphides* I could feel the *corps de ballet* counting. In *Carnaval* I did a spot of counting myself—for the soloists. *Le Fils Prodigue* was better danced than most of the other ballets this season, but less worth dancing



Action photograph by Edward Mandinian

TATIANA RIABOUCHINSKA IN "LES SYLPHIDES"

than some. As before, Lichine's *Protée* was a pale and distant echo of Balanchine's *Apollo*; but his *Graduation Ball* improves on a second seeing. And were it not that the very fine acting of Hélène Komarova gives me something to comment on in *Schéhrazade*, the production would have defeated my notorious politeness. As I write, the subject of *Le Beau Danube* must be held to be *sub judice*.

So far, it will be seen, programme building has been a matter of one drear after another. But of course the lack of inspiration in the choice must be due, to some extent, to states of repair.

What of the company? On the whole the men can be said to be stronger than our Wells male dancers but less brilliant than the soloists of the company Lifar brought here last summer. Dokoudovsky beats well and turns superbly, but lacks finish in everything else he does. Orloff, as The Drummer in *Graduation Ball*, has given the best dancing performance of the season. Indeed, this was the only theatrically exciting moment in all the eleven hours and two quarters spent in Row A, The Stalls Circle, seat 76. Skouratoff, seen last summer with Lifar, has an interesting line and his beats are precise, and, as partners go these days, he is romantic and alert and pleasing enough. Jasinsky

COLONEL DE BASIL ACKNOWLEDGING THE FIRST NIGHT RECEPTION. NICOLAS ORLOFF, DAVID LICHINE, TATIANA RIABOUCHINSKA (BEHIND THE BOUQUET), AND ANATOLE FISTOULARI, THE CONDUCTOR, CAN ALSO BE SEEN Photograph by Frank S.



has been never less than conscientious, but never quite inspired. Claus, pupil of Nijinska, is slight, compact and promising. Psota seeks to hide his lack of youthful elasticity by energetically overplaying all his old men. Hoyer has discovered that he can act. Lichine's King Dodon was a ribald, rheumy-eyed, dribulous, nodding old lecher, the Falstaff of the Ballet Russe.

Of the ballerinas? Well, Riabouchinska is no longer feather-light and chic. Once she took our eyes each time she took her stage—now we have to search for her upon it. We never have to search for Olga Morosova, for there she is, in the centre of the stage, in ballet after ballet, occasionally just off-balance, but with all the charm and confidence of a friendly puppy. Of the newcomers the only soloist for whom I would care to predict a certain, if prescribed, stardom is Renée Jeanmaire, who was seen in London last summer with the Lifar Ballet. Save in *Le Fils Prodigue*, she has been miscast this season. Jeanmaire is no classical ballerina. She is a well-equipped soloist of the modern *genre* with will and courage to spare. She never fails to answer to the demands of the choreographer and she has the attack and theatre-focus of a future star. Moussia Larkina is another soloist whose work is full of spirit. She has the right temperament for a secondary dancer in Ballet Russe. Gèneviève Moulin dances both

Baronova's roles and those of Riabouchinska with a pale prettiness. She is light and slight and she works hard, but she lacks that generous temperament that goes to make a dancer's stage-personality. In the *corps de ballet* Dokoudovska had the liveliness of movement that we associate with Russian dancing.

Now I do not need to tell you that this is a band of dancers with which to retire and on which to work, and not a company that is ready to be presented at Covent Garden. To retire with strong creators—the Massines, the Balanchines, the Robbins, the Tudors, the Helpmanns and the Petits; and to re-emerge after many months of hard work by everybody, led by some new Danilova, let us say, for example, la Chauviré, and some other Woizikovsky—a Kalioujny or a Babilée would suffice. And here, with its great heritage of master-ballets and its prospect of brave new works to come, would be a company to re-conquer the world.

Short of some such phoenix-like renewal—and the Ballet Russe seems to require renewal every twenty years or so, hence Diaghilev, Basil and Ballet Theatre—it looks as though Ballet Russe, that exciting, international scintillation in the world-theatre, must die and give place to national companies, conscientiously interpreting the local art-idiom of London, Paris, New York and Moscow. (Continued on page 27)

GÈNEVIÈVE MOULIN AND RENÉE JEANMAIRE IN "GRADUATION BALL"

Action photograph by Frank Sharman





THE happiness to be derived from watching the performances of a ballerina in her prime can be complemented by the different pleasure of observing the brightness of a new star rising to take a place in the firmament.

There are no sudden leaps to fame in the Bolshoi Company, and the shape of things to come are discernible at a fair distance. It is three years since the eighteen-year-old Plesetskaya made her debut in *Nutcracker* and expectations were formed that she would prove a ballerina. An expectation, but by no means a certainty. How often does it happen that a young dancer of outstanding talent comes to the theatre from school, after a year or two makes a promising debut, and then from one cause or another fails to maintain her success? Those five years following a dancer's graduation are perhaps the most critical of her entire career, for they are essentially the years when physical weakness is most likely to manifest itself and when a precocious talent may flare and fade into the second class.

When I left Russia eighteen months or so ago, the ballerinadom of Plesetskaya was not assured. I return to find her talent developed and the promise realised.

From the first she enjoyed formidable advantages of heredity and example, for she is the niece of two

Moscow dancers of exceptional brilliance, Asaf and Sulamith Messerer. Asaf in particular made history, for he did not start his training till nearly full grown, and after only two years in school graduated with the rank of *premier danseur*. Drive, intelligence, and a complete devotion to work are the keynotes of the Messerer success and are obviously shared to the full by Maya, for I never met a young woman more determined, ambitious and devoted. She was trained by Gerdt, a Leningrad teacher, but I should say that in all essential matters her career was guided by her uncle and aunt—indeed, whether inborn or acquired, her style is very reminiscent of theirs.

However I should be wrong if I gave the impression that Plesetskaya was simply another Messerer. On the contrary, she is a dancer of a most unusual type, and this very peculiarity, though it will inevitably narrow her range, will, at the same time, make her interpretations extraordinarily interesting.

Hitherto I had seen her dance with what I felt was complete success, the Queen of the Wilis, the mazurka in *Chopiniana* and the autumn variation in *Cinderella*. But when I took my seat to see *Raymonda* I confess I felt a certain trepidation. It is a severe test for a girl of twenty-one to dance a role which is not only technically very difficult, but dramatically weak, so that it is left to the ballerina's personality, artistry and style to create it into a work of art. *Raymonda* is the one part which *cannot* be danced indifferently: if it were the theatre would be empty by the end of the first act.

Brilliant is an overworked adjective, but from her first appearance like a spray of blossom suddenly flashed across our vision, what other term is appropriate? A complete sense of relaxation overcomes us and absolved from anxiety we presently have leisure to analyse.

To begin with, the appearance of a ballerina is important. Plesetskaya has large hazel eyes, the brows of an enchantress, and an extremely haughty nose. She is taller than the average, with a long throat, slender, well-shaped legs and arms, and narrow feet with arched insteps. In fact she has a perfect build for what is known in Russia as a lyric ballerina. However, this is where an interesting contradiction shows itself; like the great Leningrad dancer Dudinskaya she is at her best in *allegro*. In spite of that sculptured and extended line, a certain lack reveals itself in *adagio*. Outstanding technical virtuosity is usually united to a rather short stature and strong firm limbs, so that when we find it in this crystal nymph it has many beauties and surprises. If Lepeshinskaya's dancing is a sparkling stream, Plesetskaya's is a series of flashes. She has that concentration of power in the

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region of the waist without which no dancer can achieve greatness, her back and arms have a limpid and musical grace, and the speed and finish of her execution is dazzling. Her most remarkable quality, however, is *ballon*. Teachers with whom I have talked in Russia unite in saying that the spring of a dancer is a natural endowment, "it can't be taught". However this does not explain why the spring of *Russian* dancers is so outstanding compared to that of English, French and American. When pressed on this point one teacher said that she thought a natural capacity to spring was increased not only by flexibility of the instep but by a development of the muscles in the small of the back. This is interesting, as, of course, the distinguishing characteristic of the Russian school is the development of the whole region between neck and buttocks to the point where it can be said: a dancer is as strong as her back.

Cherkhasova possesses a higher leap than Plesetskaya—the highest I have ever seen in a woman—but Plesetskaya has *ballon*. Old balletomanes say she is the only young dancer to have this lovely quality. She springs and then hovers for a moment in the air and these aerial poses are beautiful and clear as the wind.

For one so young she dances with great authority. She never shows a trace of hesitation, and the pauses in her dancing shine with haughty brilliance. But in her walk, in the posture of her motionless, balanced body *en pointe*, immaturity still reveals itself. In these moments she is no more than a clever girl. She is a cold dancer. Virgin, the Russians say, as if admitting a defect which time will repair. But I think that those who expect to see this quality change are wrong. Unless I am much mistaken her appeal will never be to the heart, and maturity will only intensify the sparkle in the ice. But there is a coldness which has the quality of light, which can stir the imagination with its suggestion of some vestal sorceress. Marble, frosted crystal, the clouds tearing on a winter moon—all these images are cold, but they have their own power and poetry, and to see Plesetskaya dance *Chopiniana* is to feel them vividly.

Time may well provide her with a rival in the exquisite shape of the young Struchkova, a dancer of such potentialities that those who wonder who will inherit Ulanova's roles instinctively turn their eyes in her direction. But this is as yet uncertain; she is only eighteen and anything might happen. At the moment of writing, Semyonova is about thirty-nine, Ulanova thirty-four, and Lepeshinskaya thirty, so when one thinks of the future one sees Plesetskaya. She is already a fine ballerina, and in ten years' time may be a great one.

Ballet Lectures at Morley College

A SHORT course of public lectures on The Ballet is to be held at Morley College during the coming autumn. The lectures will be on Wednesdays at 6.30 p.m., beginning on October 1st, and will cover the history of ballet, music and design, choreography, and the Sadler's Wells and Russian Ballets and the Ballet Jooss. Speakers include: A. V. Coton, Rudolf Laban, Prof. Edward Dent, Miss Vivienne Bennett and Kurt Jooss. The fee for the course is 5s. Full particulars can be obtained from the Secretary, Morley College, 61 Westminster Bridge Road, S.E.1.

Erith Ballet Club

THE above Ballet Club was formed about six months ago and is affiliated to the Erith Theatre Group, an amalgamation of dramatic societies and an orchestra. This Group is now converting a disused cinema into a theatre entirely for the use of the Group, and when this is ready in the autumn the Ballet Club will be able to present its own performances, many of its members being dancers. Anyone interested should write to the chairman, Mr. A. G. Nunn, 51 Langdale Crescent, Bexleyheath, Kent.





MOIRA SHEARER, MARGOT FONTEYN AND PAMELA MAY IN "SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS"

THREE CLASSICS OF BALLET

By A. V. COTON

AS soon as I write the title of this essay I become aware of an added complexity to the already difficult business of communication; for the word "classical" derives from "classic", and the misuse of the former word in modern balletography merits a separate essay. Probably the two most dangerous words in the ballet vocabulary today are "poetry" and "classical", for both are constantly used to denote conditions unrelated either to Poetry or The Classic.

Most survivors of Higher School Certificate will be aware that poetry is an art, and that ballet is an art, too; and that although ballet comprises elements from several arts, poetry is not—legitimately—one of them. Poetry is something tangible: that marked fluency of rhythmical control, or unusual subtlety of emotional projection which certain dancers possess, are the qualities generally being referred to by the word "poetry" in writings on ballet. The term "classical ballet" is, I suspect, an unfortunate inheritance from Levinson; it is used to define any work from the pre-Fokine era, yet the only extant ballets from all the

years up to 1900 are survivors from, or derivatives of, the Romantic Age. If it be argued that these works *are* classical because they are part of the development of the continuously expanding five-positional academic dance, it could be pointed out that the term "classical" can only be applied to works marking the culmination of a particular line of development. The so-called classical ballets consist of some classics of Romanticism and a lot of poor imitations of Romantic works.

Because it is an ephemeral art-form, it is difficult to fix the value of any ballet once the first bloom has worn off; yet an effort must be made to define some classics of the art because the truly classic work has not only a higher theatrical value than a routine production, but presents in concentrated form all the experience of its creator, and is an invaluable guide and reference to all other artists in ballet.

It is not a peculiar gift to our generation that, contemporarily, ballet displays such a richness of forms; this is the logical outcome of theatrical conditions over the whole of Europe since about 1800. Russia provided

the perfect system of training-schools in which the scientifically formulated method, based on Blasis' researches, could be applied like any other academic system of training. Without the Russian academies, Diaghilev could never have happened (as a theatrical manifestation of our century) and the art of ballet would by now have ceased to exist in Europe. So, logically, we look for the first example of a classic work in the canon of the first of the Diaghilevian masters—Fokine. (It is obvious that we cannot define a classic from any previous period, for we have too little evidence on which to base systematic comparisons. Only a fantastic accident has kept alive some fifteen ballets out of the three or four hundred composed between 1790 and 1900—and these, as we know, are all derived from only one phase of ballet's history, the Romantic Age.)

As ballet means, fundamentally, dancing-to-be-seen (where all other forms mean dancing-to-be-done) the first condition for the classic accolade must be the aesthetic quality of the work of ballet; its appeal must be primarily through the visual sense, and its story or atmosphere or implication is a secondary matter. *Les Sylphides* qualifies instantly, because throughout its twenty-odd minutes of dancing, nothing takes place which is not acceptable by even the most uninformed spectator. The work does not have to explain itself in any way; once the theatregoer has noted (and he may feel no compulsion so to do) that the music is Chopin's and the décor Benois', the rest of what happens comes to him directly through the eye and the ear, and he need refer no part of what he sees or hears to any previous experience. To define the stark meaning of classic ("belonging to the first class or rank in literature or any other art") more liberally, we may say that a classic work must be simple without being obvious, elevated without being distant (and therefore incomprehensible) and it must not strongly emphasise either its age or its modernity.

By the time any balletgoer has seen *Les Sylphides*, one, or two, or three hundred times (a by no means uncommon experience of performances) it is obvious that he or she has acquired a good deal of knowledge of the minutiae of the science and art of five-positional dancing . . . yet the hundred-and-first performance can be as enchanting as was the first. This can happen only because the experience of watching dancing of the highest order goes on being rewarding all the time. But the condition for this is that the choreographer shall have moulded the dance-images so that the dancers' bodies are *all the time* presenting satisfying pictures of motion and stasis; this occurs when he has a complete technical knowledge of the dance-forms on which he bases the choreography, and so uses that technical knowledge that he has eliminated every gesture, every single movement of even one hand, or

arm, or leg, that could intrude upon the entire plastic incident which is the duration of the ballet.

Fokine called *Les Sylphides* a "romantic reverie", partly in tribute to the basic dance-style which he worked from, and partly to offer all the explanation needed for the shape of the work. But the single male character is almost as dehumanised as are the twenty-odd females, and all we need to know is that we are watching a series of bodies-in-movement—a male creature bewitched by a group of ethereal beings with whom he dances in some ghostly milieu at midnight. The patterns for the female dancers comprise every technical feat that was known to Taglioni, the great ballerina of the Romantic Age (the title of the work indicates Fokine's definition of the idiom he was using, for Taglioni's greatest role was in *La Sylphide*, 1832). The part for the male is arranged to reveal all the plasticity and the grace of aerial motion that the technical developments of the past hundred years had made possible for the male dancer. The patterns of the dancing are to some degree susceptible to analysis; mostly they can be watched as three-dimensional configurations of simple geometric shapes. The "skeletons" of the dances are the perpendicular and the parabola (for the aerial sequences), and the circle and triangle for the *terre-de-terre* dancing. But, as expressed through fluent and disciplined bodies, these terms become transmuted into images suggestive of flowers unfolding, of clouds expanding and melting away, of fountains flinging upwards tender jets which slowly quiver, then shudder into nothingness . . . It is because the dance-shapes have, continuously, this suggestiveness, that this ballet maintains its fascination, provided the standard of dancing is kept at a certain level. Related to the inescapable implications of the music (Chopin's circumscribed nostalgia and conventional lyricism of harmonies) the dancing can evoke whatever personal visual images we care for most. I have heard the whole sequence of patterns "translated" into an imagery of waves and winds, and one spectator, with lengthy experience, can "read" the whole ballet as a succession of architectural forms dissolving into musical shapes and reforming as architecture! This sort of personal visualisation can only come through a work so pure in form that no alien element ever intrudes. It is significant that only the juvenile balletgoer in the earliest stage reads any emotional implications into the picture of the lone male and his cohort of disembodied females.

It is obvious that however much the conventions for décor, lighting and the use of music may alter, the fundamental condition of a *good* ballet is that its dance-structure shall be its strongest element. All ballets since *Les Sylphides*, which rely for effect mainly on five-positional dancing, and only secondarily, or not at all, on folk-dance forms, must be measured

absolutely by comparison with *Les Sylphides*. This method of judgment is unavoidable, because the little expansion of technique that has taken place since 1908 can only be shown in a ballet based on the *Sylphides* prototype. (The success of such works created since 1908, as *Petrouchka*, *Firebird*, *Choreartium*, *Cotillon*, etc., has depended on atmospheric, narrative and architectural-structure elements, rather than on pure dance developments.)

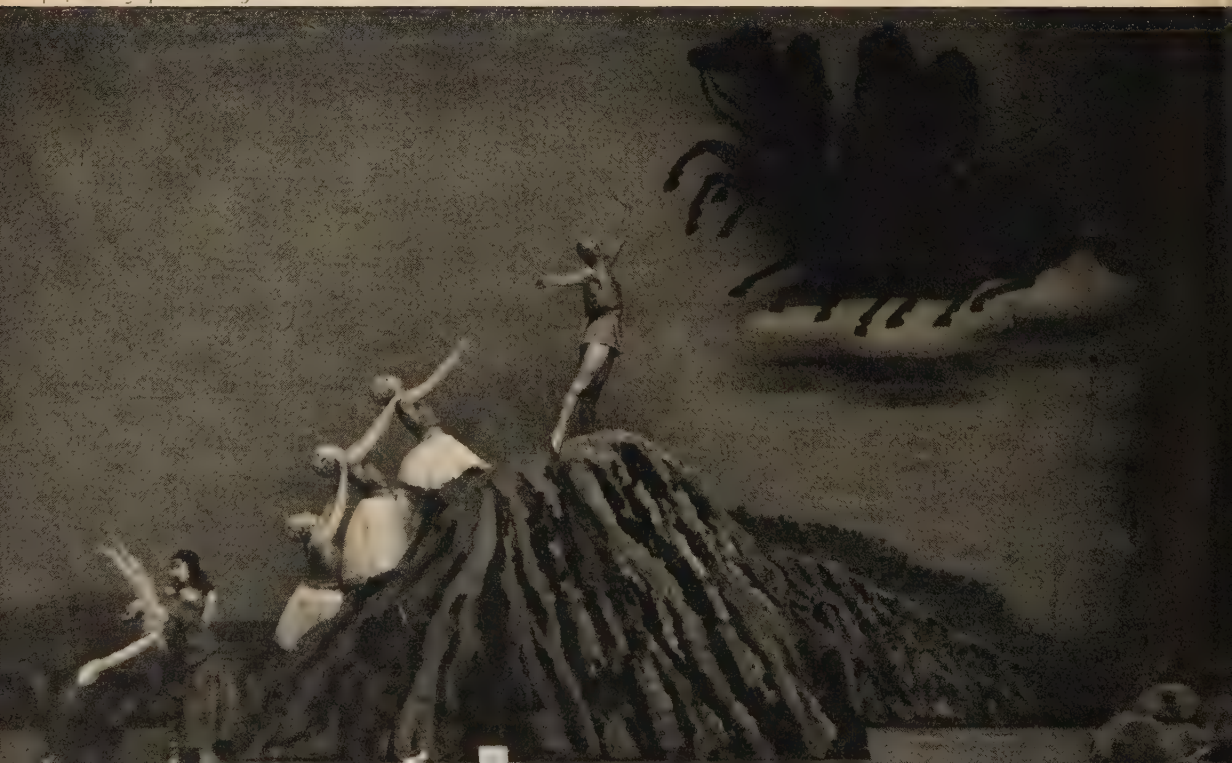
The next ballet of equal importance with *Les Sylphides*—and for exactly the same reasons—was Balanchine's *Apollo*, created to Stravinsky music in 1928. Again, the story element was almost unimportant. Apollo is born and is tended by nymphs, he arrives at manhood and finds himself on Mount Olympus in the company of Three Muses; they dance together and afterwards ascend in a heavenly chariot to Parnassus. Four superb dancers were brought on to a stage together to reveal the most purely classical choreography since *Les Sylphides*. The differences of visual imagery were considerable; Balanchine's tendency is to make the male and female elements in any dance-figure work in closer physical harmony than Fokine had ever done. Every choreographic phrase was individual in shape—no single bar or step looked quite like that of any other choreographer—yet the technical elements for both male and females were exactly the

same as those used by Fokine twenty years previously: the difference was one of building them into shapes of different proportions and with different *tempi* of execution. Where Fokine's ballet was a series of related harmonic progressions, Balanchine's separate dances were brilliant vignettes of solo, duetto or multiform dancing. The action was less spread over the entire stage, and, further, was less bound to the music by a tight bar-and-step parallelism or counterpoint, as is the case in much of *Les Sylphides*. . . . Once again a choreographer had reacted against the conventions of his period and had proved his mastery of choreographic form by composing a work out of the basic shapes of dancing, untrammelled by any impedimenta of story, heroics, incidents or characterisation. And, again, Balanchine had done the identical thing that Fokine first did twenty years before—he eliminated every gesture, flexion and movement that would not contribute to *his* particular plastic visualisation, arranged to this particular music. (This work was danced by the Diaghilev Ballet in London in 1928 and 1929, and no other version of it was seen here until Balanchine's latest production, with Ballet Theatre of New York, was brought to London in 1946.)

Not until his career had run for twenty years and had been marked by over forty ballets, did Frederick Ashton create a work comparable with these two; it

"APOLLO" IN 1928, WITH LIFAR, DANILOVA, DOUBROVSKA AND TCHERNICHEVA

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a photograph by Merlyn Severn

THE PRE-WAR ORIGINAL BALLET RUSSE IN "LES SYLPHIDES", WITH DANILOVA AND PETROFF

is not possible to rate *Symphonic Variations* as anything other than this century's third great monument of classical choreography. Arranged to César Franck's music of that title and with décor by Sophie Fedorovitch, it was first presented at Covent Garden in April, 1946.

So many bad productions of *Les Sylphides* and so many unimaginative performances of nineteenth-century romantic-subject ballets have been provided for English audiences in the past ten years that a taste for pure dancing is almost entirely undeveloped in this country. One suspects that a good deal of the mass-reaction to *Symphonic Variations* was more a tribute to the dancers involved (all of whom have a large personal following) than to its quality as a dance-work. Yet this ballet satisfies exactly the same conditions as do *Les Sylphides* and *Apollo*, and is dependent to a less degree than either of them on plot, setting or musical reference. The curtain rises on a vast stage, and before the deep-set backcloth of sprayed white-and-green are seen six immobile and minute dancers, clad all in white, with a little black relief here and there. Nothing whatever is stated or suggested of place, person, condition or circumstance; here we have six living bodies within a prescribed area of space which, throughout the duration of the music, move in splendour and heroism, creating solo, duet and ensemble dances of a fascinating variety of shapes, emphases and con-

figurations. The disparity between these persons and the vast area of their action proposes an imagery of infinities, in either the macrocosmic or the microcosmic field; so that, not too fantastically, we can catch the imagery either as planetary bodies moving with subtle rhythm against cosmic vastness, or as the geometrical complexities revealed in watching the rapid formation of crystals under a microscope. The picture is, indeed, more suggestive of inorganic than organic life, with its colours confined to black, white, silver and lime-green. On analysis it can be seen that no step or movement-sequence is daringly new—every part of every pattern is something that one could quickly isolate in that laboratory where a dancing class takes place. Yet the majesty and splendour of this ballet is made out of the same kind of simplicities that Fokine and Balanchine both used in their master works. . . . In each of these instances a choreographer of assured mastery, moving perhaps to some degree deliberately, and to some extent intuitively, has re-stated the primary function of theatrical dancing by re-shaping its basic material into a new and exciting assemblage of images.

It will be the measure of success or failure in the next decade's creations with pure classic dance-forms that the works created shall have obvious affinities with—and incalculable differences from—*Les Sylphides*, *Apollo*, and *Symphonic Variations*.

THE BALLET RUSSE DE MONTE CARLO IN 1947

By GRACE ROBERT

IN 1938 when the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo first appeared at the Metropolitan Opera House in the capacity of heir to the position previously held by Col. W. de Basil's Ballets Russes as the foremost touring company in America, it boasted a breath-taking array of stars. In one company, sometimes performing in a single evening, one could see Danilova, Markova, and Slavenska, Franklin, Lifar, Massine, Panaieff, and Youskewitch, as well as soloists of first-rate talent. Lifar, whose antics pleased nobody on either side of the footlights, quickly returned whence he came, leaving the classic roles for Youskewitch, whose masculine elegance of style was a revelation to American audiences. Of the three ballerinas, only Danilova, always slightly overshadowed by the "babies", was familiar. Markova and Slavenska quickly found admirers: Markova for her exquisite aerial quality; Slavenska, to this observer, at least, seemed to attract those to whom a movie appearance confers prestige. The repertory, while including such soporifics as *Schéhérazade* and *Prince Igor*, also offered large scale revivals of *Coppélia* and *Giselle*, and new ballets of varying quality by Massine.

Since those days many changes have occurred in the Monte Carlo Ballet. Of the many stars, only Danilova and Franklin remain; of the soloists, Nathalie Krassovska has achieved the status of second ballerina; the *corps de ballet* has become almost one hundred per cent. American, many students graduating from the School of American Ballet to its ranks. The Massine Ballets, except for *Gaité Parisienne* (become in its turn a soporific) have given place to those of Balanchine. The Metropolitan is no longer its New York home, performances now taking place at the City Center. Even the audience has changed, for the low prices at the City Center, the nearest thing to a community theatre New York possesses, have made it possible for students and people of limited incomes to attend, and have frightened off most of the chic audience who went to ballet performances at the Metropolitan to display themselves.

This metamorphosis, on the whole, has been a good thing for ballet in America, and might be better still if the company had not become something closely resembling a framework for Danilova, and, to a lesser degree, for Franklin. As there are no adequate substitutes for these outstanding personalities, when either, or both of them are incapacitated, many of the ballets become dull and pointless. Fairness forces me to point out that there are certain exceptions. *Concerto Barocco*

(Balanchine) to the Bach concerto for two violins and orchestra is performed by a beautifully integrated group of girls, with Marie-Jeanne and Nicolas Magallanes (required only as *porteur*) as soloists. This, though quite abstract in conception, is extremely moving, the balletic equivalent of chamber music. *Commedia Balletica* (originally called by its choreographer, Todd Bolender, *Musical Chairs*) to portions of the *Pulcinella* suite by Stravinsky, was also designed to be independent of personalities. I would like to say that *Ballet Imperial* (Balanchine) to Tchaikovsky's seldom heard and intensely national Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Major, also survives the absence of outstanding dancers; unfortunately, I have never seen a performance of it in which the three principal roles were properly cast. A nostalgic montage of the ballets of the great period of classic choreography, it demands dancers with an appreciation of the *nuances* of dramatic pantomime as well as the true *danse d'école*. With Danilova, Youskewitch, and possibly Alicia Alonso (this is pure wishful thinking) it would be a great theatrical experience.



PAULINE GODDARD, MARIA TALLCHIEF AND YVONNE CHORONKA in "Ballet Imperial"

BALLET TODAY

Of the remaining Balanchine ballets, *Baiser de la Fée* is an undeniable masterpiece, which I have found delightful through several changes of cast. However, *Dances Concertantes*, also with music by Stravinsky, is a disaster when Danilova and Franklin do not appear. With them it has a febrile brilliance; with dancers of less than their rhythmic exactness, it becomes laboured in spite of the scintillating music and the enchanting décor by Berman. *Mozartiana*, to the Tchaikovsky suite of the same name, has been allowed to deteriorate; *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, to music by Richard Strauss, a series of *divertissements* strung on an involved plot, is interesting chiefly because of its décor by Berman. Of *Night Shadow*, Balanchine's most recent work for the company, the less said the better. It is based, distantly and somewhat grotesquely, on the plot of *La Sonnambula*, by Bellini, whose music, arranged by Rieti, provides the score. There are some excellent and entertaining *divertissements*, but, when the plot emerges, it is more stupid than even a ballet plot need be. There is a *pas de deux* of a truly monumental silliness for the protagonists, in which the poet stalks the sleepwalker, performing at times movements which seem designed to trip her. The climax of the story, in which the heroine carries the now dead poet off the stage, has drawn disrespectful snickers from audiences who are willing to admit that even Balanchine may not on occasion.

Franky and Johnny, based on the famous bar room ballad, with music by Jerome Moross and choreography by Ruth Page, has little or no dancing, being in the nature of a dramatic pantomime. For my taste it is too long drawn out, but it provides good roles for the versatile Frederic Franklin, and Ruthanna Boris, one of the most talented members of the company.

Rodeo, with an enchanting score by Aaron Copland and choreography by Agnes de Mille, is but a ghost of its former self. Produced originally when the Monte Carlo was considerably more international in character, it was a lusty example of regional Americana. Paradoxically, in the hands of an almost all-American cast, it has become quite characterless, save when the English Franklin breathes some life into it by resuming his original role.

The newest ballets in the repertory, *The Bells* (Ruth Page) and *Virginia Sampler* (Valerie Bettis) have not been successful. *The Bells* began in a state of confusion, and has remained there in spite of optimistic tinkering. *Virginia Sampler* is the work of a choreographer more accustomed to working in the so-called "modern" idiom. For this ballet she chose a balletic vocabulary of movement which she was not qualified to handle.

The Monte Carlo Ballet follows the current fashion by including various classical *pas de deux* in its programme. One of these, *Pas de deux Classique*, designed by Balanchine for Danilova and Franklin, to music by Tchaikovsky, is utterly charming, a masterwork in



ALEXANDRA DANILOVA AND FREDERIC FRANKLIN IN
"NIGHT SHADOW"

miniature. The other examples are more conventional: the *Blue Bird* variations, and the spectacular *Magic Swan*, from Act III of *Swan Lake*. These are usually performed by Nathalie Krassovska and Leon Danielian, the latter the principal male classic dancer of the company. He is a dancer with brilliant *batterie* and elevation, but has mannerisms that I find unpleasing, though neither audiences at large nor critics agree with me. Nathalie Krassovska lacks the technical equipment for these assignments. I have been told that recently Ruthanna Boris has been permitted to replace her on occasion, with excellent results.

In spite of my criticism (no ballet company is perfect), the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo is performing splendid service to the community in bringing ballet to thousands who otherwise could not afford it. If its policy of playing down the talents of the younger members of the company in order to emphasise the brilliance of the stars seems narrow, no doubt in time this will be changed. No company that presents the incomparable Swanilda of Danilova, and even intermittently good performances of the Balanchine ballets, can be less than a potent artistic force in the world of American ballet.

The Duncan Melvin action photograph on the cover shows a scene from "Sailor's Return", by Ballet Rambert.

ASHTON AND THE CHOREOGRAPHER'S PROBLEM

By JANET SINCLAIR

JUST as to the modern ear, trained in the intricacies of Stravinsky, Strauss and Britten, the music of Purcell seems crystal clear and full of simple elegance, so to the present-day ballet-goer, his head full of the rich complexities of *Choreartium*, *Cotillon* and *Symphonic Variations*, the old ballet classics appear the plain statement of basic formulæ from which the modern idiom evolved. As we watch the ballerina of to-day executing Giselle's dances we can believe that the steps she gives us are identical with those created by the first Giselle over one hundred years ago.

At the time of their creation the ballets we call "the classics" contained innovations startling to their generation; but their patterns, being so much more simple by comparison than those of new ballets of this century, do not appear difficult to preserve intact. It could surely all be written down so easily! Every movement is set, clearly formed, symmetrical, and the *corps de ballet* move about the stage like pieces on a chessboard, one figure complementing the other with the precision of infantry on parade.

Fokine, in freeing ballet from this mathematical calculation, at once set the choreographer a more complex problem. If a ballet is to be counted as great it must live for the benefit of future generations long after its creator has gone the way of all flesh. Notation of ballet has always been a problem, and has never been solved practically and permanently by a classical choreographer. If one is to rely solely upon the memory of those taking part, if the roles are only to be remembered and shown to young dancers by those who went before them, then the more complex and subtle the work the less proportionately is the chance that it will survive in anything resembling its original form.

A good example of this was given in 1937 when Fokine joined forces with de Basil's company and supervised the performances of his own ballets. *The Firebird*, which had been performed by this company for several years, was at once altered under his direction and in many places was unrecognisable from what had been performed before. Whoever had put it on for de Basil had "remembered" it very badly—and that only twenty years after the creation of the ballet.

Ballets are made, and at once, unless the vigilance of the choreographer or ballet mistress is acute and constant, alterations creep in. This is so with the works of Fokine who freed ballet from many conventions but who still clung to the ideal of symmetry; how much more with Massine's ballets, where the patterns are often asymmetrical but no less beautiful than those of his predecessor? Massine grasped at the abstract ideal

that Fokine had caught in *Les Sylphides* and developed it into *Choreartium*; Ashton has perfected and stated it for all time in *Symphonic Variations*.

But here is the snag. Ashton has worked towards the summit of his achievement in this ballet for twenty years. How many of his ballets as performed today have the perfection of their original creation?

Ashton is the most unpsychological and undramatic of all choreographers—all he wants to do is to make beautiful patterns on the stage. The richness of invention of movement that makes the ballets of Ashton so moving—by comparison the ballets of nearly all his contemporaries appear dry and static—leads him into the trap of creating roles so perfectly suited to the individual capabilities of his dancers that when the creators of the roles are absent the ballet is often irrevocably damaged. An instance in point is the present production of *Nocturne*, for the removal of Fonteyn, Brae and Helpmann from the cast produces an effect similar to that caused by reading Flaubert in a poor translation.

The only full scale ballet of Ashton's which has survived innumerable changes of cast without suffering is *Les Patineurs*, which in spite of its merry-go-round music, is as gay, as fresh and as finished as when it was first danced. Nearly all the interpreters of the "white" *pas de deux* have been entirely successful (though here again Ashton has modified occasionally to suit the individual) and the Blue Girls and Patineuses have been changed over and over again: almost every English dancer must have appeared in the *corps de ballet* at one time or another, and the Blue Boy has been danced, since his creation by Harold Turner, by Carter, Helpmann, Hamilton, Kersley, Field, Mendel, Powell, Rassine, and Shaw, and among these varying interpretations two at least have been quite as satisfactory as that of the original creator of the part.

The only other ballet of Ashton's with anything like the same resilience (except for the perennial *Façade*, now a very old joke well worthy of pension) is *Les Rendezvous*, which also has stood up well to the varying casts it has been given. This ballet has been out of the repertoire too long and should be revived, preferably for the second company.

Ashton's gift for movement makes him the ideal choreographer for the young dancer. Most young dancers when they begin to dance leading roles have had no time, and frequently no inclination, to study acting and the creation of character on the stage: all they can do is dance, and Ashton can be relied on to give them steps that will suit them and help them to

display their capabilities. His ballets did an infinite service to the development of the young Fonteyn, and it is in his ballets still that she is at her most beautiful: very few English dancers have not gained from his influence, and many have made their names in interpreting his choreography. And yet after the madly exciting, cheering, beflowered first night one can settle down in one's seat and watch, week by week, performance by performance, the finish of the ballet being rubbed off, the stuffing coming out of it like the wind out of the dead Petrouchka. It is heartbreaking to see the sharpness and clarity blurred, the change and decay that attacks his choreography with the persistence of dry rot. This seems to happen inevitably, whether the ballet is in regular performance or not; after a number of years a revival is announced; attend the performance and the bare bones are there, the rest has either been remembered badly or tinkered with. It is a great mistake to tinker with a masterpiece—it should be re-choreographed entirely, or left alone.

There seems to be no answer to this state of affairs. Either Ashton must concentrate on the *Les Patineurs* type of ballet, or at any rate eliminate from his work all the subtlety and invention that make it so beautiful (an impossible solution): or he must resign himself to being nothing more to posterity than a legend. Or else some philanthropist must produce the money to have such ballets as *Symphonic Variations* filmed methodically from three or four angles right away, before the original inspiration is gone.

Ballet of 1947 without *Giselle* seems impossible: to the ballet-goer of today, 2047 without *Symphonic Variations* is equally difficult to visualise. Yet, unless some sort of foolproof recording is applied to the Sadler's Wells Ballet now—and filming seems the only practical solution—the ballet audience of 2047 will listen to the *Symphonic Variations* of César Franck in the concert hall, and only one per cent. of them or less will know that a ballet was created to that music one hundred years previously: a ballet by the greatest choreographer of his day, only one or two of whose works have survived—Frederick Ashton.

The English Actor-Dancer (continued from page 10)
themselves, are the results of an unfortunate, even dangerous, position. The actual standard of the balance achieved between dancing and interpretation in the Massine revivals at Covent Garden—particularly *Le Coricorne*—is, therefore, almost miraculous; an amazing tribute to the great actor-dancer's teaching and personal example. Moreover, it proves that the division is not altogether irremediable; the "literary gents" may yet abandon their wooden legs and recover some of the expressive agility of their Diaghilevian predecessors. The real test, however, will not arise until Massine leaves the company and the curb placed on the tendencies of English dancers is removed.



RAM GOPAL, THE FAMOUS INDIAN DANCER WHO IS NOW IN ENGLAND, AS SEEN BY RONALD SEARLE

Les Ballets des Champs-Élysées in London (continued from page 6)

The revival of *Los Caprichos* without Nevada was hardly worth while, and *La Fiancée du Diable*, a choreographically weak ballet, was given very poor performances. The classical excerpts (even Babilée's Blue Bird never reached his last year's standard) were unedifying: why does the company bother with these hackneyed fragments when their *La Sylphide* revival is worth a dozen such?

To end, as the company always ends a first or last night, we come back to *Les Forains*. This ballet is to the Champs-Élysées what *Aurora's Wedding* was to the later Diaghilev company, what *Fancy Free* is to Ballet Theatre—the ballet which everyone loves the best. One can discuss for ever the funny and the sad little human foibles that it displays, and one can marvel for ever at the intense vitality and penetration of Roland Petit's performance. He has two great moments in this ballet: when he reluctantly rouses his tired little troupe to practice and, at the very end, when he slowly turns up his collar and one knows the night will be cold and the next meal perhaps very far away. The characters of *Les Forains* all have a future. Perhaps that is the highest tribute that can be paid to their creator.

BALLET ALFRESCO

By JASPER HOWLETT

THE unreliability of British weather makes open-air performances sporting rather than artistic events, and so it may not be out of place to sum up a summer's dancing as sports are reviewed at the end of their seasons.

In outdoor theatrical entertainment the performers either use a stage or appear in natural (or semi-natural) surroundings. The first category requires little consideration, because, apart from changed lighting, and the distraction of the audience by the discomfort of cold or apprehension of rain, conditions are much the same as in indoor theatres. What is variously described as "Ballet on the Green Sward", "Terpsichore on the Lawn", or just plain "Dancing on Grass", is different.

The characteristics of such performances vary little. In a public park a notice appears by the gates announcing the event, and on the days of performance arrows point "To the Open-air Theatre", the direction being often vague and sometimes entirely misleading. At the appointed hour it has probably just been raining, is raining, or threatens rain, and the "theatre" is surrounded by hessian, exuding the strong peculiar odour of that material when damp.

After considerable consultation it is decided that the entertainment will take place, and music issues from a loudspeaker van. The stage is a green strip with two obligingly symmetrical trees, a background of hessian, over which local youths continually attempt to peep illicitly, and there is a large notice, "Artistes' Entrance Only", which graces every scene.

Ten minutes after the advertised time it is announced that the programme will commence with a selection from *Coppélia*, with choreography by Madame X, the leader of the ballet. Fourteen young women appear, none fully trained, some apparently beginners, wearing short tutus, and their underwear, much in evidence, is in violently contrasting shades. They wear *pointe* shoes, which within a few minutes are blackened and sodden on the damp grass, and their faces are made up for the lights of an indoor theatre. Having struggled through some uninspired variations and ensembles they acknowledge kindly applause, and retire through the opening marked "Artistes Only".

Next comes a "Selection from *Les Sylphides*", the choreography, astonishingly, again by Madame X. Some of it is, the rest is what she could remember of Fokine's. As there are no males, the trees are found useful for supporting unsteady arabesques on *pointe*.

Les Sylphides is followed by *Spectre de la Rose*, choreography once more by Madame X, danced by six young

women in pink crinolines and shawls, and one in a short mauve tutu.

After an interval for recovery, there is a Strauss waltz performed by two girls in butter muslin and a third supporting *en travestie*, then a scene "Bluebell among the Toys", where one girl turns good cartwheels and somersaults. During this item there is a shower. The dancers carry on stoically, the front rows of the audience put up umbrellas, and the back rows protest.

Then, the sun having come out, a particularly British child performs a "Russian Dance" to Czech music, in a nondescript costume. The evening ends with an item which the audience is informed has been specially requested, "Daybreak in a British Meadow". Here, to the mixed music of Grieg, Debussy and Eric Coates, the birds and flowers awaken and dance, with much running round the two trees, and support from their trunks.

Such a programme is typical, and it may be argued that it is harmless, healthy and good value for the sixpence or shilling charged. But artistically it is abominable, and, by lowering the already low standard of discrimination in this country, does actual harm.

There are several points that should be incorporated in a charter to which every producer of dancing on grass should conform. Firstly, where the conventions of the indoor theatre are impossible, purely stage works (such as excerpts from *The Sleeping Princess*) should be avoided. Secondly, it is unwise to give a work with your own, mediocre choreography when it is associated with such masterpieces as *Les Sylphides* by Fokine. Thirdly, the smoothest of English grass is unsuitable for *pointe* work, and English grass is frequently both uneven and damp. Fourthly, stage make-up is not becoming or necessary in broad daylight at close quarters.

If such conditions were accepted, the majority of Ballets on the Green Sward would find themselves without programmes, and might ask what they could substitute. Their attention could then be drawn to the old court dances, very little seen here—the pavane, the galliard, the gavotte, minuet or gigue—with costumes ranging from the mediæval to the eighteenth century. Arrangements of polkas and waltzes, without using *pointes*, can be most effective. Ancient dances, meant for outdoor performance, can be adapted, a hessian background is becoming for a Greek frieze, or the gay colours of Egypt, and the trees can become the domain of classic nymphs and satyrs. A wide range of national dances are suitable, and a pleasant spectacle

BALLET TODAY

in the "green sward" is a well-performed Maypole dance.

With discrimination the open air performance can be artistic, but only if its limitations and conventions, which are not those of the indoor theatre, are realised and accepted. At present the standard of performance is too often below that of the most modest indoor theatre, and resolves itself into a battle with the surroundings and elements by the performers, and an endurance test for the audience.

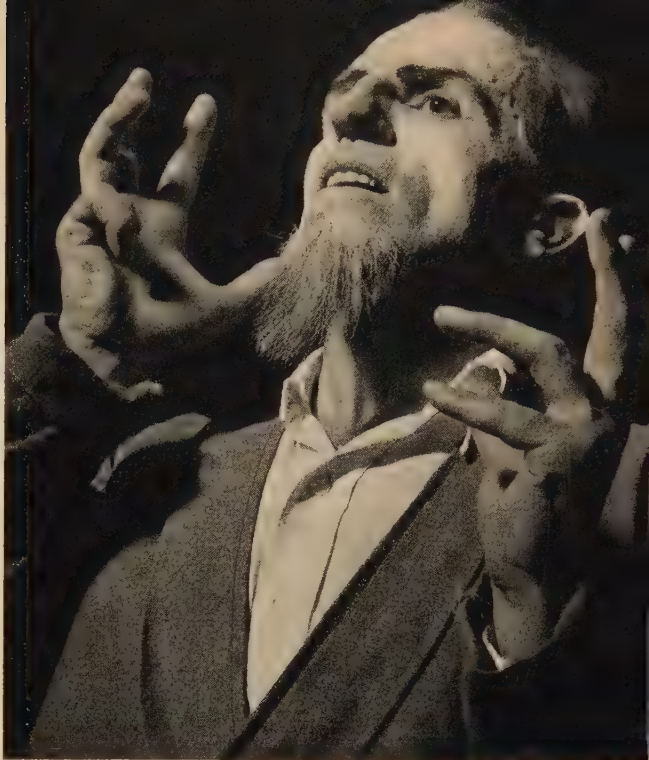
The Copenhagen Choreographic Competition (continued from page 11)

Danish. Danes one must add that they were severely handicapped by faults in lighting.)

The Czech ballets were as varied in quality as the English. Two were performed in silence, in a debased free style that was painful to watch; the other two showed a fine sense of the theatre and tackled their themes (the resistance to the Nazi occupation) with care and intelligence—though they suffered from lack of choreographic invention. Boris Milec, of the Prague Opera Comique, presented a ballet called *Jamais la guerre*. His symbolic treatment of the theme owed a great deal to *The Green Table*, in spite of the fact that Milec has never seen the work of Jooss. *Electra de nos jours*, presented by Laurette Hridinova, with the aid of students of the Prague Conservatoire and dancers of the Prague Theatre of Satire, was distinguished by the brilliance of its music (by Harry Macourek) and by the skill with which the Electra legend was brought up to date.

Most of the French ballets toyed with Existentialism, and glorified Death, Anguish and Despair with distressing sentimentality; but Jean Weidt's *La Cellule* gave us the real thing. This work (showing the events which cause an old man to think of his life as a prison cell) was so unremittingly morbid and agonised that it demanded a real effort to watch it through. Weidt has done important work in reviving the French nineteenth-century mime tradition (Barrault is one of his pupils), and his mimed scenes are impressive; but he has little understanding of dancing, and he is further hampered by the fact that his performers are badly lacking in technique. The production is excellent: Weidt is just as skilful as Helpmann in the use of lighting and rostrums.

The A.I.D. made two mistakes in the running of the competition. The original terms of the competition required the entries to be new productions—but, in fact, ballets like *The Message*, forming part of a company's repertoire, were admitted. This inevitably penalised those choreographers who kept to the original terms and thus had no chance of polishing their ballets in performance. An even more serious mistake was made in selecting the jury—no less than half of which was



JEAN WEIDT IN "LA CELLULE", THE FIRST PRIZE WINNER AT THE COPENHAGEN COMPETITION

Danish. This led to awards which can only be described as fantastic: Weidt, for example, was put above Cramér, and Berk was not mentioned. These awards put the A.I.D. in a very embarrassing position, only slightly alleviated by the granting of a special award *hors concours* to Berk. Once bitten, twice shy: one can be certain that when the next A.I.D. competition is held (probably in London) these mistakes will not be repeated.

I Weep for Adonais (continued from page 15)

Perhaps I am alone in weeping for Adonais. Perhaps it is better that the Ballet should minister to the taste of the many and the close at hand rather than move the emotions of the few and far away. Perhaps "Bobby" and "Margot" are more eloquent than were Nijinsky and Karsavina. Perhaps the grand manner is just another bit of old ham. But I will never feel these things to be so. And I will never enter the vast auditorium of the, to me, loveliest theatre in the world, The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in a day-frock—however new—rather than in an evening gown—however old—without a feeling of guilt. Because for me, the Ballet must always be *en gala*. For me it must always represent, on its stages and in its auditoriums, a foregathering of the great. That is why I weep for Adonais. For from the point in time from which I am now writing, like Troy, and like the Liberal Party, it seems that he is dead.

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BALLET EDUCATION. By Nadine Nicolaeva-Legat (Geoffrey Bles, 18s. net.)

If this book had consisted only of the section called "Technical" and the examples of classes said to have been given by Nicolas Legat together with the notes stated to be taken from his diary and notebook, would have come away from reading it in quite a pleasant frame of mind; but as it is I was more than depressed by the sad fact, so clearly demonstrated here, that words nowadays have little or no value except in quantity to fill a sizable volume, where matter alone would have produced a small, good, unpretentious book.

Madame Nicolaeva-Legat states in her "Preparatory Note": "It is my aim in these pages to pass to future generations my knowledge and experience". To my way of thinking one of the most valuable things a teacher can do is to help the student to recognise the difference between fact and opinion. To do this a teacher must of course already have the ability to discriminate between them himself. I cannot see in this book any such discrimination. I gather from reading it an attempt to incorporate some principles of esoteric teaching into the study of Ballet. There are, no doubt, fundamental principles which, if we understood them better, would connect up for us many apparently isolated phenomena. But in this book, ideals, personal opinions, fact and fiction are thrown together without regard for level or scale.

In discussing point work the author commences by considering some theories on man's evolution from a quadruped. She even goes so far as to mention the opinion of an Italian doctor that "it would have been better for woman to remain on four legs since such a position would facilitate child-bearing", and by stages of positive statements about the Greek and Roman attitude towards "uprightness" she concludes with "The high urge that lifted man on to two legs continues in ballet in encouraging the dancer to rise still higher on to the tips of the toes". It is, of course, a matter of opinion whether point work is a high urge; there are many who consider it a decadence. The author goes on to say that "details of the progress from the quadruped stage . . ." are not known, and immediately goes on to say "it is, however, a fact that balancing on the toes is the result of special training . . .". It seems to me one might just as well say, "I haven't had an egg since Easter, and it is now half-past three" for I do not see how all this can be helpful in any way whatever.

The book contains numerous drawings which are, to say the least, highly uncomplimentary to any method professing a feeling for beauty of line, and it is strange

that they should be tolerated by a person who elects to describe a "graceful arabesque performed plastically with every line harmoniously thought out, the body sculptured in an expression of yearning towards a divine ideal". Perhaps I am too touchy, but it seems to me an affectation to head the section on steps of elevation "Dancing in the Air", and again I cannot see the value in the section on *épaulement* of describing the "right shoulder to the north-east and left shoulder to the south-west". I feel, however, very much in agreement with the observations in the sections on the male dancer, and at the end of the book there is an article by Nicolas Legat in which he talks about the value to the male dancer of studying athletics and acrobatics. I feel sure it would do our male dancers a world of good to follow Nicolas Legat's advice here.

MARY SKEAPING.

THE ROMANTIC BALLET AS SEEN BY THEOPHILE GAUTIER. Translated from the French by Cyril W. Beaumont. (C. W. Beaumont, 12s. 6d. net.)

The nature of this book is perfectly expressed by its title. "These charming pages", Mr. Beaumont writes in his preface, "... enable us to form a very fair idea of the appearance and ability of the past, but by no means faded, glories of the Romantic Ballet". But do they? Do they not give us rather an insight into the reveries of Théophile Gautier, into the introspections of a minor poet who used the exotic background of the ballet as the source of inspiration for a number of exquisite *petits poèmes en prose* which bear but a faint resemblance to actuality?

A close re-reading of Gautier's reviews leads one inevitably to the question: What were the glories of the early Romantic Ballet? The truth is (and to find it we must remove the misleading myths and legends—those literary associations which soften and beguile as enchantingly as the romantic *tutu* itself) they were few and included several mixed blessings. The music of its ballets, divorced from the creative vitality of the major Romantics, was uninspired and technically indifferent; Felix Mornand, writing in 1855, remarks: "*L'Opéra a lui-même fléchi plus d'une fois sous cette indifférence musicale, et n'a été un peu soutenu que par les pieds de ses danseuses*". Costumes and settings were often equally tasteless and unsuited for the special requirements of ballet. Indeed, the management of the Opéra, famous for its cheeseparing, frequently reduced expenses by using discarded costumes and "flats" in its new productions. Once again the leading artists of the day were ignored; Gavarni's solitary incursions into this field reveal only too well the loss to ballet.

Our contemporary apologists are fond of citing the Romantic Ballet as being an important revolution in the art of choreography. It was nothing of the kind. The nature of choreographic design during the forties



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showed no real advance on that of Dauberval at the beginning of the century. Moreover, the increasing importance of the ballerina, arising naturally from the use of the full *pointe* and from Blasis's additions to the technical repertoire (most obvious in the use of *élévation*), drew the attention of the choreographers away from the *corps de ballet* and concentrated it on the creation of ingenious solo *pas*. Levinson refuted this prevalent misconception once and for all when he wrote (of Taglioni): "*La Sylphide avait élargi le domaine du ballet par la conquête de la région du rêve. Mais le génie n'étant pas transmissible, tout le faix de cette royauté spirituelle reposait sur ses frères épaules. A sa personnalité créatrice le reste du spectacle se trouva sacrifié. Le corps de ballet étant réduit à l'accompagnement discret, l'ensemble déperit. Taglioni était une artiste, mais elle devait fatalement inaugurer l'ère des virtuoses*". Gautier, characteristically, pays little attention to the *corps de ballet*; they are, it would seem, rather insignificant flowers and insects in the gardens where his splendid humming-birds and moths disport themselves.

These were the real, perhaps the only, glories of the early Romantic Ballet, these humming-birds and moths—the Taglioni, the Ellsler, the Grisi and the Cerito. And it cannot be denied that Gautier understood their qualities with an appreciation tempered by critical perception. His reviews, which Mr. Beaumont has translated beautifully and with his usual scholarship (there is an error in the date on page thirty-seven, but it is too obvious to be important), are as flawless as everything else he did within the limited emotional compass of his temperament. That a large part of them emanate from dreams and fantasy is not a sufficient reason to mar our enjoyment of such fine writing. As criticism they are marred, not by Gautier's lack of judgment but by his supreme indifference to everything except plastic beauty. ALAN STOREY.

MONA INGLESBY, BALLERINA AND CHOREOGRAPHER. By Geoffrey Handley-Taylor. (Vawser & Wiles, 8s. 6d. net.)

During the great days of Ballet in Western Europe (approximately 1909 to 1929) there was comparatively little contemporary literature. People went to see it but had not then developed the urge to write their opinions based on a few months' experience. Nowadays ballet literature is turned out on an apparently endless belt, and as there are only a limited number of facets to the jewel of ballet it follows that we have a reiteration of the same old thing in different words from a different angle, the angle being the particular bias of the writer. It is therefore surprising that the International Ballet and its director-choreographer-ballerina should have had to wait six years before receiving the accolade of a book. Geoffrey Handley-Taylor's undoubtedly sincere enthusiasm for his subject leads him to a schoolboyish exuberance of phrase and

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judgment where a more sober approach would have greater critical value, and he discusses as though both were of equal importance Miss Inglesby's methods as choreographer and her preference for scrambled eggs at breakfast. He also makes some sweeping statements about critics which he would not find it easy to substantiate with actual facts. The book is well illustrated and short, but has little other merit. P. W. M.

WOODEN STARS. By Douglas Fisher. (T. V. Boardman & Co., 10s. 6d. net.)

This enchanting book tells the story of the Lanchester Marionettes, the most famous puppets in this country. Puppetry is a very specialised theatrical art and its magic is not only for children. I remember once seeing Tchekov's *The Proposal* performed by puppets, and after the first two minutes I lost all feeling of unreality. They did not even seem small, so complete was the illusion given by the perfect proportions of the miniature stage and its appurtenances. To all who have succumbed to this particular charm *Wooden Stars* will have an endless fascination. The puppet theatres of Moscow and Southern Italy are famous throughout the world. The Lanchesters have made their tiny theatre at Malvern an English centre for this art. In addition to the many pictures of the star performers in scenes from their masterpieces, there are several pages of photographs showing the various stages of puppet-making, but I do not guarantee that these will enable you to go and do likewise. P. W. M.

MONA INGLESBY

BALLERINA AND CHOREOGRAPHER

by Geoffrey Handley-Taylor

The first biography ever written of Mona Inglesby, Prima Ballerina and Choreographer of International Ballet, the only complete book about that company, and the first dealing with one of its members.

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